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### Title

Interview with "Ms. Rob," health educator at San Lorenzo High School Health Center.  
Interview by Naomi Schapiro.

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I can tell you why I decided to do this in the first place. So, in '97 I was in the Welfare office with a friend of mine, she was down there to get MediCal. I overheard two social workers talking about a 9 year old girl who was pregnant. And at this time I had left my 9 year old daughter at home who was in the back yard making mud pies with rose petals and oranges, so it just totally floored me that this 9-year-old little baby was pregnant and that her parents wanted her to continue. I said, OK, something has to be done. So I went in and started taking some classes with Girls, Inc. and Planned Parenthood to get some information and I had just started talking to parents. I noticed that parents were still filtering the information that the teen pregnancy rate in Alameda County was still growing. So I said, forget you, I'm going to talk right to your kids.

And so '98 I just started with Girls Inc. exclusively and going out and talking mainly to mothers in domestic violence shelters, who had a lot of young daughters with them, and they themselves were single and it was information that they didn't have either. So I started doing that and I registered my eldest daughter at San Lorenzo High School and I was approached by a woman, who said, "How would you feel about a school-based health center on this campus?" I said, "That would be fabulous!" I said, "What type of services would you offer?" and she said, "What type of services would you like to have?" and I said, "Oh I'd like health education for teenagers in regards to self-esteem and pregnancy prevention and disease

prevention,” and she said, “OK, well we’ll write that in the grant.” So I sat on the grant-writing committee and we wrote that in the grant, and I came in here and there was no outline for health education. After it was written, though, I applied for the job, and I basically wrote out a letter that said, “I want this job” and sent it to the School District and everybody signed off on it, so I came in and I wrote an outline for what a health education visit should look like. And just started going in really by the skin of my teeth and with base knowledge of birth control methods and prevention skills and diseases signs, symptoms, you know, treatments outcomes and things like that and started sharing this information with kids.

And I learned that – and they are kids to me, everybody calls them youth and all that, and some of them are children, some of them are kids, and some of them are youth and some are young adults, there really is a range you can see in cognitive development. And so I had to learn to tailor it, to fit each of these groups, these age groups as well as to be able to work with children who were – what is the politically correct term for it now? With some mental deficits, and cognitive deficits. So I had to learn how to tailor it so all of them could get it, cause they are all sexual. And they taught me how to do what I do, so I started to understand that this space that I was in was golden, and that I had in front of me a captive audience of up to 1300 potential youth that were at one point in their life were going to become sexual beings and they were right there. You know, I could bring them in and they could speak to me with however they needed to get out what they

needed to get out and I could filter it and send it back to them, properly and empowered for themselves.

One thing that happened to me most recently was I ran into a student in East Oakland. I didn't remember this girl from a can of paint when she walked up to me. And she says, "You're that condom lady from San Lorenzo High, aren't you?" And I say, "Yeah." And she said, "I graduated from there in '03." And I said, "Oh really, what are you doing now?" And she says, "I 'm part owner of a beauty shop down here in East Oakland." I said "Oh" and she said "I don't have any kids, you told me, 'Don't go out like that, don't be a sucker,' and to put myself and my goals in front of everything else, and I did that and I'm part owner in a beauty salon. All my friends have kids, they don't have anything going on for them, they're on public assistance. I make my own money, and I feel so good." She said, "And I'm glad I saw you because I've been wanting to tell you, 'thank you.'" And I was like "Yes!!" So, you, know, that really compensates for the salary. That was a bonus. See, it makes me misty, when I get stuff like that.

This is the bomb health squad in this place. And I really think, because you and I are from way back with and I even think way back then there was an understood level of consciousness about theory and validity to what these kids were going through, that they are people, and that it wasn't our plan, it was their plan, and we all use that client-centered counseling approach. I see you guys use it as well, and I see we buddy up off of each other, that good cop-bad cop kind of thing, and we throw them off because we switch it up on

them, but we all work very well together and we are all respectful of each other's skills and we are all willing to teach each other, and the fact that we are open to learn from each other. So there's a lot to be said about being able to work collectively, individually and collectively at the same time I guess, for lack of a better word, cause we're all here doing our own thing but it's all connected. But at the end, or even in the hallway, we say, "well I've got so and so and this is what is going on and " - "well, send them to me," or even if it's just in passing in the middle of our busy day we're still interacting with each other in the best interest of the kids. I wouldn't want to work anywhere else, this is a really special space.

Leslie Robinson, "Ms. Rob", Health Educator, San Lorenzo HS Health Center, San Lorenzo, CA, as told to Naomi Schapiro 9/15/11